[3] Chapter 1

Origin and History

Preliminaries

131 As they have for a long time past, the Bambara today occupy in compact groups a vast region on either side of the Niger, which comprises most of the territory in the circles [administration division] of Bammako, Bougouni and Ségou in the French colony of the Upper Senegal and Niger.

162 According to the census (1), the following list shows the

1. In Haut-Sénégal et Niger [The Upper Senegal and Niger], by Delafosse.

distribution of the Bambara in that colony:

Circle of Bougouni	146,966
" " Bammako	104,216
" " Ségou	109,758
" " Sikasso	30,000
" " Kita	2,339
" " Bafoulabé	2,100
" " Koutiala	30,055
" " Goumbou	22,110
" " San	20,103
" " Sokolo	19,996
" " Diénné	17,247
" " Niafounké	16,000
" " Nioro	9,355
" " Mopti	7,277
" " Bandiagara	928
Total	538,450

After the Mossi, this is the largest group in the colony of Upper Senegal and Niger.

144 the Third group (southern): four peoples, the Diallonké [Dialonke], the Samo, the Samorho, and the Sia; plus four small tribes of doubtful classification, the Blé, the Natioro, the Ouara, and the Sembla.

More recent studies by Urvoy, Dr. Pales, and Mlle. Tassin de Saint-Péreuse involving very numerous measurements will soon permit determination of the racial characteristics of the Sudanese populations and the establishment of a new classification.

B. Geographical Distribution

131 In his study of the Bambara of Ségou, Charles Monteil tells us that it is impossible to determine what the precise boundaries of the Bambara empire were, because a frontier as we understand it has no meaning for the Black. The empires did not seek to dominate such and such a region; their goal was, above all, the exploitation of the greatest possible number of individuals, without regard to localities or races.

131 162 At the present time, the Encyclopédie coloniale et maritime [Colonial and Maritime Encyclopedia] considers that [3] the Bambara form a group of about a million individuals who extend west-east from the region of Siguirio as far as Macina along both sides of the Niger and the Bani rivers, and south-north from the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta to Sahel de Nioro. In addition, there are 40,000 in Senegal: peanut farmers near Kaolack, Thiès, and Diourbel, and captives at Fouta Toro, Saint-Louis, etc. But they are most numerous in the circles [a "circle" is an administrative division] of Bamako (310,000), Ségou (190,000), and Bougouni (110,000). To [563] these one may add 125,000 Métis [mixed bloods], Peul-Bambara, of whom 72,000 live in the Bougouni circle alone.

131 619 More precisely, the great mass of the Bambara is distributed in a region that may be delimited as follows.

To the northwest, three tribes have been catalogued in the Kaarta: the Dianguirté in the circle of Nioro, the Niamassa at Nioro, and the Massassi to the south of Nioro.

To the north, in the Sahel, the region of Bakounou and Waghadou is inhabited by the Kalongo tribe.

To the northeast, the Bambara live in the Macina, the Issa Ber, the region of Goundam, and up to Timbuktu.

[141] Finally, let us point out that according to the observations of
[143] Dr. Pales, the cormique index of the Bambara is 50.8. Dr. Pales and J. Linhard have calculated the percentage of sickle cell anemia which is: 108 B, 8 percent.

IV. Demographic Data

A. Distribution of the Population

[142] The different censuses of recent years give the following estimates.

Senegal -- 150,000 Mandingue; 711,000 Ouolof; 288,500 Peul; 264,000 Sérère; 202,500 Toucouleur; 132,511 Dioula (most
[146] of the Bambara coming to Senegal are Navétanes [temporary workers]).

Guinea -- Bambara are found in the circles of Kankan, Kouroussa, and Siguiri. They are for the most part Navétanes, the major part of the population consisting of the Foula, the Malinké, the Soussou [Susu], the Kissien, the Guerzé, the Toma, the Baga, the Diallonké.

Mauritania -- 500 Bambara live in the circle of Gorgol, along with 8,500 white Moors, 10,000 Foula, 22,000 Toucouleur, 250 Ouolof, 4,500 Sarakolé; and 1,000 Bambara live in the circle of Guidimaka among 13,000 Moors, 4,500 Foula, 1,000 Toucouleur.
[6] [Chart appears here in the original text.]

[7] Upper Volta -- Some Bambara live in the Ouahigouya circle, mingled with Mossi (a majority), Peul and Rimaïbé, Yarcé [Yarse], Foulcé [Fulse], etc.

Ivory Coast -- The Korhogo circle includes 290,000 Sénoufo, Malinké, and Bambara.

Finally, the census of 1950 in the Sudan shows a total of 798,900 Bambara out of a total population of 3,336,740, divided as indicated in the recapitulatory table on page 6.

We see that the Bambara are grouped in the circles of Ségou, Bamako, and Bougouni, where they form the majority of the population.

We shall give a somewhat more detailed breakdown for these three centers, using the still fragmentary information that has been assembled up to now.

In the Bamako circle the population is divided into ethnic groups in the following manner: [pp. 8-9]

B M E 162

3: Paques--7A S-4 (no date) 1954 FA8 Bambara FA8 Massi Wolof M530 FA28

Recapitulatory Table by Circles (General Population), 1950
Established by the Bureau of Political Affairs of the Sudan General Government

Races et territoires A. O. F. Africains de statut commun et de statut personnel	Bafoulabé	Bamako	Bandiagara	Bougouni	Gao	Goundam	Issa-Ber Niafunké	Kayes	Kita	Koutiala	Mopti	Nioro	San	Ségou	Sikasso	Tombouctou Tombouctou	Total pour le territoire
Bellat						35.026											35.026
Bambara	994	299.074	21.538	110.000			20.765	13.896	3.200	33.536	20.530	20.973	42.424	202.617	9.082	293	798.922
Peul	10.200	8.213	97.001		11.095	12.875	71.258	1.962	200	3.217	33.318	39.831	15.297	77.595		1.822	383.884
Mossi	28	857	4.043		61		135	234		49	27.955		303	4.832		9	38.506
Marka	150	27.746					4.381	29.519	3.000	8.100	26.870	112.776	30.679	21.553	406		265.180
Songhaï		647	9.962		102.712	62.821	1.025			454	6.000		625			26.518	210.764
Malinké	68.753	62.671	2	4.932				11.503	53.530			3.598	52				206.041
Minianka		400	3							125.551	500		29.897	2.843			158.994
Maures		2.958	433		19.266	2.743		3.536		67		9.313				15.502	53.818
Senoufo		300	1	10.000						15				228	117.588		128.132
Touareg		20	19		77.640	17.007	252									58.599	153.537
Samogo		150	4.909												26.218	8	31.375
Foula Bambara		9.600		42.100					21.600	182				2.444	22.673	15	98.614
Bobo		500								11.933	2.570					1	15.004
Bozo		400	22			1.582	4.916				18.000		61.712			83	86.715
Kassonkés	23.800	600						20.297				5.734	474	23.447		9	74.361
Dioula	270	11.050								6.958					29.333		47.611
Toucouleurs		700	1.781					23.574	320		1.500	19.680		84	434		48.573
Kagoro		17.395							5.010			4.492					26.897
Somono	4	5.748						1.762			7.000						14.514
Marka Bambara	13.350	750	8.115	885			4.381							14.787		28	42.296
Diallonke	5.100	100							4.600					5.112		8	14.920
Peuls berberisés													60				60
Ouolofs	76	700	68		3	1	7	1.055	132	4	25	2.139	2	65	23	28	4.328
Ouassoulounké	3.200		2	41.000				8.790				1.675					54.667
Diawara	2.500		274									33.785					36.559
Diawambé	2.520	150							515		3.500	4.143		1.684			12.512
Diakanke																	2.016
Dogon		388	157.966				20.675			30	680		3.779				183.516
Guirganke			42									1.620					1.662
** Divers	726	48.340	2.209	346	11.187	3.820	1.725	889	13.421	569	9.925	1.148		12.527	727	192	107.751
TOTAUX	133.671	499.455	308.480	209.263	221.964	136.875	129.520	117.017	105.328	196.665	158.373	260.907	185.104	369.818	206.984	103.115	3.336.739

* Races and territories French West Africa - Africans of public status and of personal status.

** Others

B M 162

3: Paques--8 S-4 (no date) 1954 FA8 Bambara FA8 Mossi FA28

[Bamako circle] [population division of ethnic groups]

	City	Central Subdivision	Koulikoro Subdivision	Kolokani Subdivision	Dioïla Subdivision	Kourémalé Subdivision
Bambara	19,000	93,974	56,048	59,930	68,310	812
Peul	1,000	2,074	4,251	500	350	38
Mossi	500		157	200		
Marka	1,000		26,746			
Habbe	250		136			
Songhaï	450		197			
Malinké	3,200	32,434	139			26,898
Minianka	400					
Moors	2,600		358			
Sénoufo	300					
Touareg	20					
Samo	150					
Foula-Bambara	600				9,000	
Bozo	400					
Bobo	500					
Kassonké	600					
Dioula	5,200			850	5,000	
Toucouleur	700					
Kagoro	100		3,795	13,500		
Somono	500	804	3,454		300	690
Marka Bambara	150				600	

(continued)

3: PPaques--9 S-4 (no date) 1954 FA8 Bambara FA8
Wolf M530

B W 182

	City	Central Subdivision	Koulikoro Subdivision	Kolokani Subdivision	Dioïla Subdivision	Kourémalé Subdivision
Diallonké	100					
Ouolof	700					
Diawambé	150					
Others	130	5,698	196	610	344	

[Bamako circle]

[population division of ethnic groups]

[8] The Bougouni circle is divided as follows:

●162
361

Cantons	No. of Villages	Population	Observations
Bambeledougou	13	1,785	Bambara
Banimonatie	47	10,829	F. B and Bambara
Bilatouma	5	1,771	Foulah-Bambara
Danou	8	3,413	Bambara
Debelendoudou	11	2,053	—
Dialakadougou	6	1,696	—
Diban	7	2,398	—
Domba	18	2,510	—
Falani-Auola	16	5,086	—
Gouantiedougou	41	9,771	—
Keikero	8	1,705	—
Kokoun	16	3,157	—
Kola	13	2,122	—
Kouroulamini	30	8,653	—
Niene	20	12,525	Senoufo
Siankadougou	16	2,288	Bambara
Sibirila	29	9,652	—
Siondougou	28	3,697	
Tiemala	54	16,492	Foulah-Bambara
Tiendougou	69	16,624	—
Tinkatougou	16	3,342	Bambara
Tyan	16	3,369	—
Yiridougou	13	3,263	—
Zana	8	2,939	—
Yorobadougou			
Niamala	15	2,886	—
Keleyadougou			
Nienendougou	Census in progress		
Nafanandougou			
Fulala			

[9] B. Population Movement

162 In 1912, Delafosse in Haut-Sénégal et Niger [Upper Senegal and Niger] gave a total of 538,450 Bambara in the following regions: [514]

Bamako . . .	146,966	Bougouni . . .	104,216	Ségou . .	109,758
Sikasso . . .	30,000	Kita	2,339	Bafoulabé	2,100
Koutiala. . .	30,035	Goumbou.. . .	22,110	San . . .	20,103
Sokolo . . .	19,996	Djenné . . .	17,246	Niafunké..	16,000
Nioro . . .	9,355	Mopti . . .	7,277	Bandiagara	928

161 All of these figures are notably lower than current ones. However, one must not infer a population increase too hastily. The difference in population figures result of better census methods rather than of a real increase.

Moreover, current demographic information must be considered as still approximate. In fact, censuses may go on for several years in a single region, and those of certain cantons are not yet finished. A large part of the population still avoids the census in order to escape taxes and military service. In certain villages the clandestine population may be as large as the declared population.

167 A number of the Bambara who leave the country temporarily as migratory workers in Guinea, Senegal, the Ivory Coast, and the Gold Coast escape all registration.

161 563 Finally, as soon as we leave the purely Bambara region of the Ségou circle to go into the region of Bougouni, for example, a large part of the population counted as Bambara is in fact of mixed origin, Foula, Malinké, but follows Bambara custom, often no longer speaking the language.

563 This simple enumeration shows how rare it is to find a Bambara ethnic bloc which is not heavily mixed with other tribes. This dispersion is doubtless the result of a complicated historical evolution as we shall see further on.

But we can already point out that the link which unites the different peoples is the chefferie. The different peoples under a common chief little by little consider themselves to be of the same people as their chief. Sometimes the chief may have adopted the nationality of the country whose direction he has assumed.

As an indication, we give the following tables, furnished by the Bureau of Political Affairs of the Sudan. It has not yet been possible to evaluate the rates of births and deaths nor to establish

[text continues on p. 13]

[11] IV. General Movement of the Urban Population

161 The urban population numbers 220,317, or 6.5 percent of the
162 total population.

The principal urban centers are: Bamako, Kayes, Ségou, Mopti, Sikasso, and Gao. Except for Gao, the growth is considerable.

Cities	1939	1950	Increase	Percent of Increase
Bamako	32,761	85,000	52,239	162.5
Kayes	15,894	23,275	7,381	46.4
Ségou	8,391	15,335	6,944	83
Mopti	6,379	9,208	2,829	45
Sikasso	11,817	19,558	7,741	15.2
Gao	6,923	7,231	308	4.90

C. Emigration

167 It is rarely definitive. It is undertaken either for commercial reasons or from the desire of the young to earn enough to pay the bride price of their fiancée. It affects chiefly the circles of Gao, Timbuktu, Niafunké, Goundam, Mopti, Ségou, and Bamako. The region most often visited is the Gold Coast.

At Timbuktu, there is caravan traffic with Morocco by way of Taouedi and Tindouf, and with the Touat.

At Bandiagara, certain cantons (Dinangourou, Ibi, Iréli) experience a traditional temporary emigration to Upper Volta where the young go to work a year or two and then return.

At Bafoulabé, the emigration movement towards French Guinea remains very weak, about 20 persons.

At Bougouni, about 1,500 young people annually leave for the Ivory Coast, following the example of the Dioula. This is a seasonal movement, but the youths often prolong the venture year after year before going home, and some of them ultimately settle on the Ivory Coast.

At Nioro, from Bakounou northwards (circle of Aioun and Atrouss [Aioun el Atrous?], there is an agricultural nomadism to new lands. This migration from one settlement to another is concerned only with the fertility of the soil, without regard for the border at Nioro and Yélimané. One also notes temporary emigrations towards